3. Exploring the Legacy and Context of Ravana.

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Sugriva's Betrayal: The Tale of Vengeance

Rama and Lakshmana sought help in Kishkindha, where they encountered Vali's brother, Sugriva, who shared many similarities with Vali. Sugriva held deep respect and affection for Vali, but Vali had expelled Sugriva due to a past incident. During a battle with an Asura inside a cave, Sugriva, who was outside, noticed blood flowing from the cave and, fearing danger, sealed the entrance with a large rock. He then informed the kingdom of the incident, leading them to believe that an evil force threatened them. As a result, Sugriva was crowned as the new king. When Vali emerged from the cave days later and discovered Sugriva's newfound status, he was enraged. Vali tried to explain but feeling betrayed he uttered the word from him then insulted and banished Sugriva from the kingdom, depriving him of land, family, and even his wife. This injustice fueled Sugriva's desire for revenge against Vali.

Sugriva sought revenge and aimed to reclaim his wife and lands. Despite being banished from the kingdom, Sugriva's loyal companion, Hanuman, remained by his side. Upon encountering Rama and Lakshmana approaching from a distance, Sugriva instructed Hanuman to ascertain their intentions and, if necessary, eliminate them. However, upon learning their story, Hanuman believed in their cause and brought them before Sugriva. Aware of the conflict between Vali and Sugriva, Hanuman reasoned that their alliance could be beneficial. Sugriva, after hearing their plight, resolved to join forces with them to

rescue Sita and seek vengeance against Vali. Concealing the details of the cave incident, Sugriva portrayed Vali's mistreatment as the sole reason for his desire for retribution. Additionally, Sugriva tested Rama's prowess by challenging him to shoot an arrow through seven trees. With ease, Rama's arrow pierced through not only the trees but also seven mountains, leaving Sugriva in awe and convinced that only Rama possessed the strength to defeat Vali.

In the final confrontation, Rama, Lakshmana, Sugriva, and Hanuman arrived at Kishkindha. Vali's wife spotted them and alerted Vali, who recognized Rama as his lord. Vali declared that had anyone else referred to Rama as a stranger, he would have killed them. He approached Rama, but Sugriva intercepted and challenged him to a fight. Despite not being keen on fighting, Vali engaged Sugriva in combat. Meanwhile, Rama, positioned behind a tree, refrained from shooting an arrow to avoid inadvertently harming Sugriva. After the skirmish, Vali departed, wounded Sugriva questioned Rama about his restraint, to which Rama explained the risk of misplacing the arrow and inadvertently harming Sugriva. Sugriva accepted the explanation. The following day, Rama presented Sugriva with a garland to distinguish him from Vali. Once again, Vali eagerly confronted Rama, believing Sugriva to be present. This time, Rama fired an arrow from a distance. Vali, sensing the arrow's approach, caught it with his hands, recognizing Rama's name inscribed upon it. Accepting his fate, Vali released the arrow, which struck his chest and lodged in his back. Rama was astonished by the arrow's behavior, pondering how it remained lodged and did not pass through Vali's body despite his earlier feat of piercing seven trees and seven mountains.

The Bittersweet Demise of Vali: Rama's Moral Dilemma

As Rama and Lakshmana approached Vali, Vali inquired whether the arrow that struck him was Rama's doing, expressing surprise at the unexpected attack. Rama responded by recounting what Sugriva had said about him, and offered to spare Vali's life. However, Vali declined, recognizing that even if he were spared, he could never attain the honor of dying at his lord's hands. He accepted his fate but lamented that unlike Ravana, who had fought him face to face, Rama had struck him from behind a tree. Rama was left speechless by Vali's words. Before passing away, Vali also revealed that his brother Sugriva had a weakness for alcohol and requested that Rama not hold it against him. He then bestowed upon Rama the authority over Kishkindha, allowing Rama to take whatever resources he needed from the kingdom. While this gesture pleased Rama, it also weighed heavily on him with a sense of guilt.

Building the Bridge to Lanka: Hanuman's Journey and Rama's Reflections

Under Hanuman's leadership, Sugriva granted his people's assistance to Rama for the journey to Lanka. Upon reaching the present-day location of Thalai Mannar, they encountered an obstacle in reaching Lanka. Unlike Ravana's flying vehicle, the Pushpaka Vimana, they had no means to cross. With the aid of the Kishkindha residents, they constructed a bridge and finally arrived at the shores of Lanka. From the mountain's summit, they beheld the breathtaking beauty of Lanka. Rama remarked to Lakshmana that while poets may extol Ayodhya as the epitome of earthly paradise, Lanka's splendor

surpassed it, acknowledging Ravana's greatness as a king. Despite his prior expectations of a harsh and unappealing realm under an Asura's rule, Rama was pleasantly surprised by the beauty of Lanka. Wanting to gauge the well-being of its inhabitants, Rama dispatched Hanuman for reconnaissance. Hanuman was struck by the contentment of the people and their reverence for education, a legacy of Ravana's rule. Observing the formidable army of Lanka, Hanuman marveled at its magnitude, dwarfing even Ayodhya's military divisions. Upon his return, Hanuman subtly conveyed to Rama the prosperity and military prowess under Ravana's reign. Despite the doubts lingering in Rama's mind regarding Ravana's character, his resolve to rescue Sita and prepare for war remained steadfast.

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